

Winter Crappie, Still The Best by Steve Welch

I know I preach this all the time to my clients, seminar listeners, or readers of my many articles. Winter crappie is still the best crappie fishing of the year.

I get to travel somewhat between speaking engagements and work during the winter. My guide trips come into full swing in late March and I never get a day to myself for pleasure fishing until July or later.

My vacation destination during the winter is Kentucky Lake and more precisely Paris landing down on the south end of the lake just outside of Paris Tennessee. I love to fish the ledges and with my big twenty-one foot Ranger and eighty-pound trolling motor and the two GPS systems that I have on-board. I can run and gun to many waypoints that I already have on my system from the many previous trips that I have made.

I have what you might call overkill of depth finders on my rig but I am a very good and confident deep-water fisherman due to my Lowrance systems. Up at the trolling motor on my boat I have a 332c/GPS system. Back on my dash I have a 102c depth finder only and on a ram mount beside my dash I have a LCX 26c Hard drive depth finder/GPS. I don't like to split my screen so that is why I have the other system on my dash.

My system is networked, so I can see what each is doing from the front. I have duplicate waypoints on dash and front so now I don't have to throw a buoy when I am on waypoint and can go right to my next one on the trolling motor now, rather than go back to my console and fire up the outboard to travel to next spot.

On planning a trip I just get on the web-site of Paris Landing and watch the weather and wind speed and if I get a sunny couple of days with wind under ten miles per hour then it is off we go. I tell whoever is going that to be packed the entire month of March and as soon as a good weekend hits we are off. February can be good as are all the winter months but it is March that I like the best.

Your first hint of spring and the flowers will be up and the grass greening up. That is why I prefer March, Paris Landing doesn't really get too hard of a winter and by March, and it is like our April.

I do however like going down before the fish start to move out their deep-water haunts. They will spread out and move into the many bays, winter has them bunched up.

Water temperatures don't mean as much to me as wind speed. I would like to water temps in mid forties or higher if possible. Wind down there can ruin a trip and that is why most don't like the fishing down there. You need a big boat and more importantly a very good trolling motor operator. Hovering is the key, if you are drifting all around it is impossible to catch the fish.

My home lake of Lake Shelbyville has this over Paris Landing. Wind is no problem. We have huge coves to get in and high bluffs to hide from the wind. It is for this reason and the shallow river run that I will eventually retire down there near Sullivan and continue vacationing at Paris Landing.

The fish aren't as big; however, we catch a ton. Each year about five thousand tasty crappie come over the side of my big Ranger.

Our winter fishing is just as good and depending on the severity of our winter, which will dictate where I am fishing. Our north end will freeze up, some years a week, some a month. I will fish the south end and have had some good trips down there. You just fish deeper than you do on the north end. The fish aren't quite as big but I have had hundred fish days in the afternoon alone. Limits are the norm and no boats are the norm.

The ice-out pattern that I wait for, the big fish key-in on this, and it is a ball getting these fish with a cork so early in the season. As soon as we get ice-out, the fish will move up the creeks as far as they can go and suspend just under the surface to soak up the sun's warmth. We throw a cork and stay away

from the trees. This pattern is only next to my early December bottom pattern on getting big fish. This only lasts a couple of weeks though then they settle into patterns that are more conventional. Ledge drops and the mouths of deep coves.

I will be at most of the shows in the state, come and listen in on my seminars, just don't sit on the couch all winter and miss the great crappie fishing.

Give my guide service a buzz, set up a great early crappie trip, and definitely don't wait for spring or I will be booked up and you will miss that as well.